

1 **Bumper 8**

2  
3 **50th Anniversary of the First Launch on Cape**  
4  
5 **Canaveral**

6 **Mrs. Elizabeth M. (Carlton) Bain's Oral History**  
7  
8 **Kennedy Space Center**  
9 **Held on September 25, 2000**  
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19

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24  
25

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All redlines from all participants have been incorporated in this transcription  
as of 2/23/01

1  
2 Roger Launius: It's the 25<sup>th</sup> of September 2000; we're in Indialantic, Florida, where  
3 we're talking to Elizabeth Bain about the Bumper Project. So if you would please, tell us  
4 a little bit about where and when you were born, about your parents, how you grew up,  
5 how you got to the point where you were down here in 1950 at this launch of the  
6 Bumper spacecraft.

7  
8 Elizabeth Bain: Ok. To begin with I was born in a little place in West Virginia named  
9 Bower. My mother and father were very happily married, so I was raised in a good  
10 environment. My father was a mine owner, a coal mine owner. When the mine ran out  
11 he had to go into a different business. His first business, the one that he had when the  
12 Depression hit was a bottling and an ice plant. And if there is ever anything that people  
13 could do without it's bottling and ice. So as a result during my high school years I  
14 worked for my lunch at a drugstore, and it was just a happy little time of my life. But we  
15 just didn't have any money, so as a result, I could not go to college. As a result I went  
16 to work for the, well, I can't remember exactly what it was, but it was one of the  
17 programs that the government had for investigating different things like mine sealing  
18 projects and things of that type. That covered the area of 1934 to about 1936. Then I  
19 got married and moved to New Jersey, a very unhappy marriage and as a result when  
20 the war came along that was one of the reasons that I decided that maybe I could  
21 contribute something to the war and also get out of this miserable marriage. So I went  
22 to work at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey in the Signal Corps.

23  
24 Launius: You were a civilian working for the Army?  
25

1 Bain: A civil service civilian all the time, always a civilian. I went to work at Fort  
2 Monmouth, and that was a time when there were no men and you had to really just do  
3 everything. It was a good work ethic because even though it wasn't your job you did it  
4 because you felt that you should. My first job there was explaining to people that were  
5 newly hired daily as to what kind of forms they should fill out and how. Of course you  
6 keep getting promoted, you get goofy jobs. I was a placement officer, or a clerk, and at  
7 the time they needed somebody in the regular part of the Signal Corps for the Signal  
8 Corps. That was the finance officer. He needed somebody to work his Address-O-  
9 Graph machine.

10  
11 Launius: What is an Address-O-Graph?

12  
13 Bain: An Address-O-Graph is making all your different forms for the people. You have  
14 a whole bunch of names, that you've got to make. Well, on this big machine you've got  
15 to make this little disc that they could use for reproduction later on. As a result of that I  
16 got a couple of promotions other than what I normally would get. From then on, as I  
17 say, you were just asked to do all kinds of crazy things. If someone in the drafting room  
18 needed some help up there then you were sent up there. So eventually during this  
19 time, the men were being sent back from the war. A lot of them after a few years were  
20 starting to come back that had worked there. So, one of my best jobs, that I felt, was to  
21 try to get these men back into the same positions or better than what they had when  
22 they left. Some of them had accumulated quite a bit of time.

23  
24 Launius: So this is at the end of the war?

1 Bain: No, this is while the war is going on.

2  
3 Launius: While it was still going on?

4  
5 Bain: Yes, a lot of men were getting the amount of time that would permit them to come  
6 back. Some of them were engineers, some of them sub-engineers, some of them were  
7 messengers, and all types of things. So it was up to me to look into these different  
8 sections where they might be placed, maybe back into the same type of thing that they  
9 had because we could never fill up all the vacancies that we needed. I'm running out of  
10 breath. [Laughter]

11  
12 Launius: Ok, take a breath and let me ask you another question. So you were a  
13 placement officer then?

14  
15 Bain: Not then. I was just working in Obligations and things like that. A placement  
16 officer is a little bit different.

17  
18 Launius: You were responsible for moving various people through steps so they could  
19 take a position?

20  
21 Bain: Right. Then later on, not at the end of the war but when it was getting close, they  
22 decided from the War Department we needed an Air Force. So they said, "We'd like  
23 you to come and start the Air Force." Well, all of us were flabbergasted to think that  
24 here we were leaving our good little jobs at the Signal Corp and going into something  
25 we didn't know about. But I was appointed by the 2<sup>nd</sup> U.S. Civil Service Commission. I

1 was on the board of directors as a C.S. Examiner. I had the authority to go ahead and  
2 hire people for the Air Force. I could hire people up to certain grades. It was my job to  
3 make sure that we recruited the right way. I had to give the civil service test, to people  
4 who would come in. Everybody was having a struggle trying to get somebody to work.  
5 And of course, with these tests that you gave them they couldn't pass half the time.  
6 This is kind of funny; one of the guys across the hall from me, one of the colonels, was  
7 fussing because nobody was getting hired. So I said to him, ok, let's try to give you the  
8 test. So I gave it to him and he didn't pass! Then he understood it was a good test, I  
9 guess. Now, this is in the Air Force and it was a big struggle trying to get anybody to  
10 come to work. Because the men were away or a few of them were around and the  
11 women were, I don't know where. So we were trying, in the Air Force, to have these  
12 groups that consisted of professional people that we could train. We had one course at  
13 the University of Minnesota and another one at Rutgers University in New Jersey. So it  
14 was my job to make sure that all these people were taken care of. I could recruit at  
15 Camp McCoy in Wisconsin. I had to go to Chicago and get the clearance there, then go  
16 to Camp McCoy and then go to Minnesota where they were actually going to school and  
17 make sure that everybody was settled; it was my job. My children (at the time) I sent to  
18 my mother and father's in West Virginia because I had so much traveling to do. So  
19 maybe it was a continuous thing. First Minnesota, then New Jersey I had to make sure  
20 that these people were all there. They had to sign certain things what to expect.  
21 There's so many people that you had to make sure everybody was happy. And while  
22 they're taking these courses, they're flunking out like crazy because they'd never been  
23 exposed to it before. So it was really a problem trying to get somebody to assist the  
24 engineers. They were considered sub professionals.

1 Launius: What kind of courses were they taking?

2  
3 Bain: I don't remember exactly, but they were engineering courses that they were  
4 having to take. The idea was when they got through with it, they would come back to  
5 Watson Labs, which was the Air Force, and work there with the engineers. That was a  
6 big thing to try and get them all settled because sometimes you would run into peculiar  
7 little things with what was going on in their private lives. But you're real busy. So when  
8 they were graduating, I'd go up to Minnesota and get on the train and go back with them  
9 to the base. It was quite an interesting time.

10  
11 Launius: And you did this for the several years after the war?

12  
13 Bain: This was while the war was going on. Then after the war, naturally, we still had it  
14 going, they were still doing the same thing. So, a few years after that they were doing  
15 the same thing.

16  
17 Launius: At what point did you first learn about the Bumper launches?

18  
19 Bain: To begin with Watson Labs personnel were being sent up to Rome, New York.  
20 The reason was a political reason because there were too many people working for the  
21 government that were voting democratic. So they wanted to send them to a place  
22 where it was more or less republican. All of us that worked there fought against it like  
23 crazy because we didn't want to go.

24  
25 Launius: And Watson Labs was at Monmouth?

1  
2 Bain: No, Watson Labs was at Eatontown, New Jersey, which was a few miles away. I  
3 was offered a job in Rome, New York. I just couldn't see going there. So I sent out  
4 applications all over. I never realized it but our own office, where I was working, were  
5 recruiting people to come down here. There were a few of them that had already been  
6 contacted. This colonel said to me, "Why don't you go down there because we need  
7 somebody that can do things." So I said, "Well, I'll see about it." So I talked to my  
8 children and they said, "Yeah, why not?" They were anxious to get a new life, too.  
9

10 Launius: How old were your children at that time?  
11

12 Bain: Eleven and twelve. So it was quite an experience for all of us. So, let me see, I  
13 went over for this interview and was accepted and originally I was supposed to go to  
14 Washington but they decided since I had the children it was better for me to come  
15 direct. But one of the engineers who I had never seen before in my life by the name of  
16 Bill Wrye was working there. And he said, "Ok, if you're going down there here are the  
17 keys to my house. You can live there until I get down there." Which I didn't know it was  
18 such a great thing because at that time there were no place to live. So we drove down  
19 here.  
20

21 Launius: When did you do that? At what point?  
22

23 Bain: In the first of the year.  
24

25 Launius: The first of 1950?



1  
2 Bain: Yes. Right. At the time I had gotten rheumatic fever, and in order for me to get  
3 out of bed or anything my children had to massage me in the morning so I could get  
4 going. The weird thing that happened, I went to the doctor in Cocoa and of course, he  
5 gave me a shot, which was penicillin and I was allergic to it. So I had bumps from the  
6 top of my head to the bottom of my feet! But anyway, finally I did get myself  
7 straightened out. But you can imagine how you felt going to a new job with all kinds of  
8 goofy things wrong with you. Well, anyway, I finally got into my position as a chief clerk.  
9 I had to take a cut from a GS-7 step 7 to a step 7 because that was the job that they  
10 had.

11  
12 Launius: When you can down here you mentioned that Mr. Wrye had a house down  
13 here already.

14  
15 Bain: Right

16  
17 Launius: Was he on temporary duty up north?

18  
19 Bain: No, he worked in the Signal Corps at Fort Monmouth. He had been down here  
20 and established a little house or had found a house that he wanted. It's one of the little  
21 row houses before you get to Cocoa Beach. It was very handy for me. And the children  
22 went to school over in Cocoa. That was my time when I wasn't working, I was dragging  
23 them back and forth to school. But anyway, I found out that this section that I was in  
24 they were inadequately staffed, and they knew that I had worked in personnel and  
25 everything so they said ok, now you're supposed to write job descriptions, that they

1 could be hired because we were having an awful time trying to find people to work. So  
2 my job, besides running the office and everything, was writing job descriptions from the  
3 word go. So I wrote for engineers, sub-engineers, truck drivers, anything they needed.  
4 But it was just a double job really. Do you want me to go ahead and tell you how I  
5 finally got up to the Cape?

6  
7 Launius: Well, yeah, I do. [Laughter] I was going to ask you first, you mentioned a  
8 minute ago that there was no housing around here.

9  
10 Bain: Absolutely!

11  
12 Launius: What was it like? I mean, it was just desolate?

13  
14 Bain: No, there were little houses and things but nothing available for people to rent.  
15 The people who lived in their houses lived in them, and that was it.

16  
17 Launius: What did the people do? Was there a military presence established by the  
18 time you arrived?

19  
20 Bain: Well, you see, the Navy had been here. And these people were used to other  
21 people being here as far as that's concerned. But Cocoa Beach itself was a very cold  
22 place. They were rather reluctant to extend a hand to newcomers. But when I finally  
23 moved to Melbourne, it was an entirely different atmosphere. There were people who  
24 were willing to help you, and to tell you about things, where to go to get what. It was an  
25 entirely different situation.

1  
2 Launius: From the work you were doing with the Air Force, how did you end up working  
3 for the Bumper staff?  
4

5 Bain: Well, they were so short of men to take care of radars and things, that they asked  
6 me if I knew anything about radar because I had worked, you know, with people that  
7 had been into this thing, I was exposed to what they were talking about and knew what  
8 a radar set was and everything. So they said, "Ok, you're going to go to the Cape."  
9 There were two other ladies that went up with me, but they were able to work in an air  
10 conditioned van that was not on the pad. Where with me, I worked with Dick Jones'  
11 group, and it was in a rinky dinky little truck type thing, that had all the equipment and  
12 things in it printed interference control. So, the GIs that were there, about five or six,  
13 kind of felt sorry for me, so they said instead of you sitting in this truck why don't you let  
14 us work it out so that you can sit outside the truck and do the radar out there. That was  
15 the way we ended up.  
16

17 Launius: What did you do with the radar? You were an operator?  
18

19 Bain: It was up to me to operate it. See I was monitoring it, like with trucks that were  
20 coming along some of them could not be permitted on the pad itself because of the  
21 static interference. So that would show up on my radar. And of course, it was up to me  
22 to report it. They would stop certain ones from coming in because they just didn't want  
23 them to interfere.  
24

25 Launius: Were you the only woman up there?

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Bain: Yes. There was nobody but me up there, and I was sitting outside this truck. All these people were very nice to me, the generals, and the foot soldiers and everyone else. They'd come by and pat me on the back and ask me and see if I wanted a drink of water or something like that. They were very, very considerate.

Launius: What were the hours like? When did you start work? When was quitting time?

Bain: They would pick us up in the mornings, at two or three o'clock in the morning at our homes. We would come up in trucks part of the time, and part of the time it would be a rinky dinky little bus of some type. And we would run over snakes that you could not kill. I think that you already know that. So we were there all day long and maybe I'd get home about dark.

Launius: Your children were young at that point, how did you make arrangements?

Bain: They made their own arrangements. School was still out, it was summertime. They had friends that they played with, and I did not worry with them. I did not have a housekeeper or anything but they were old enough and wise enough, I guess, that they didn't need anybody like that.

Launius: What did they think about you going off to work on these rockets?

Bain: It was like any other kid. They didn't care what you were doing.

1  
2 Launius: They didn't think this was an especially cool thing?

3  
4 Bain: No, kids are kids. They just knew I was going to work.

5  
6 Launius: When you were out at the Cape doing this work, what time frame, how many  
7 weeks/months were you there?

8  
9 Bain: Two weeks, I'd say.

10  
11 Launius: Right at the end of July?

12  
13 Bain: Right. Before the 24<sup>th</sup> of course. I guess maybe about the first of the month.

14  
15 Launius: What was an average day like after you arrived? You would arrive there  
16 going out early in the morning.

17  
18 Bain: By the time I arrived there, it was daylight. I got my gear together and sat out in  
19 the sun.

20  
21 Launius: Did they bring food out to you at lunch?

22  
23 Bain: Oh, no, that's a joke. [Laughter]. The only thing they did, they had this Army  
24 mess that they brought to the lighthouse. So we would get in our little truck and go over  
25

1 to the lighthouse and eat with all the GIs and everybody. And the ladies that were  
2 working in the van, they'd get out of the van and go over there too.

3  
4 Launius: How was the food?

5  
6 Bain: Well, who knows about GI food.

7  
8 Launius: When you were working out there at the Cape, you were kind of drafted to go  
9 out there I think, late notice.

10  
11 Bain: Right.

12  
13 Launius: What kind of background and training did they give you to do your job?

14  
15 Bain: They said, "Look, here's the radar scope. It's up to you to tell us what's going  
16 on." That's really what it amounted to.

17  
18 Launius: They showed you how to operate the radio, showed you how to operate radar  
19 scope.

20  
21 Bain: Right. A radar scope, all you do is look at it. Whatever is going on with the radar  
22 scope is what you're reporting.

23  
24 Launius: Was there an audible signal?  
25

1 Bain: No, there wasn't.

2

3 Launius: Were there equipment problems? Were there things that had to be fixed?

4

5 Bain: No.

6

7 Launius: Everything worked pretty well?

8

9 Bain: Right.

10

11 Launius: Did you all have any indication that the Soviets were spying on you?

12

13 Bain: Yes, we did.

14

15 Launius: What happened?

16

17 Bain: We just sort of took it with a grain of salt. Well, so what if they're watching, so  
18 what?

19

20 Launius: What about writing checks and helping people out?

21

22 Bain: Oh, that was quite an embarrassing position for me. And I don't talk much about  
23 it very often. But this is what happened. When I worked at the Cape which was is in  
24 1953, I was responsible for all the government checks that were given out to the people  
25 at that time. These two little characters, who worked at night, told me "Please, we need

1 to get our checks so that we wouldn't have to come back in the morning." So I said ok,  
2 not thinking that the dummies would go ahead and cash them. But they cashed them  
3 that night. So the government inspectors came looking for me as to how come I let  
4 those checks get away from me before they were supposed to. So as a result there  
5 was an investigation, and they realized that I was just trying to be helpful to these two  
6 little guys at work.

7  
8 Launius: What kind of adjustments did you have to make moving down here from the  
9 North? Was it strikingly different to you?

10  
11 Bain: Not really, it was very pleasant as far as weather and everything was concerned  
12 because the group of us that came down together, we more or less stuck together with  
13 our children. We went fishing together, we'd have dinners together and then eventually  
14 with the children going to school, they made friends with these kids in school and as a  
15 result we knew their parents. Then they got into Rainbow Girls and stuff like that. To  
16 begin to tell you how nice it was for us, is that everybody was willing to be friends. Now,  
17 this is Melbourne not Cocoa Beach, because that was off limits as far as I'm concerned.  
18 The reason we liked it was the fishing and the different activities that we could all get  
19 into.

20  
21 Launius: What about Cocoa Beach was so uninviting? Was it just that people there  
22 were suspicious of you?



1 Bain: I don't know. It's like a lot of country people. They don't really accept people for  
2 awhile. And I guess I lived there about nine months before I got a house in Melbourne.  
3 It was an entirely different atmosphere.

4  
5 Launius: Talk a little bit about organizing a support group for newcomers.

6  
7 Bain: What happened is that after we were all together at the base, they decided that  
8 we better get together and have a civilian-employee association, which each section  
9 voted who they wanted in. I was the only one from my particular group that was voted  
10 in. I think there were maybe six or seven, maybe eight people on the civilian employee  
11 board. That was the one where that little colored guy was in it, too. But anyway, there  
12 was a group of us that did get together and so I helped them write up by-laws and stuff  
13 like that. We had parties and things like that at the Melbourne Casino. The general  
14 came and everybody. It was really well supported.

15  
16 Launius: The Melbourne Casino, is that the Ocean Casino?

17  
18 Bain: It's the Melbourne Beach Casino. It burned down a few years ago. But it was  
19 one of the places, in addition to the Melbourne bar, where all of us used to gather. It  
20 wasn't that we were all drinking but it was a place to get together and meet our friends  
21 and everything. The people who owned the Melbourne Bar were from Detroit and they  
22 had sons going to high school. All of us were friendly. But the other one, the  
23 Melbourne Beach Casino was a place that was about like a bar, you know. It was a bar.  
24 What we liked about it, was that the big Negro entertainers from Miami would stop there  
25 on their way North. So they would give their shows and everything. All of us really

1 enjoyed it. (I would like to explain — these were Negro entertainers that found rooms  
2 and dining difficult to locate. Melbourne was available to them and this was their reason  
3 for stopping.)

4  
5 Launius: Did you see the Bumper launch? The big one that took place here, the  
6 successful one?

7  
8 Bain: Oh, yeah.

9  
10 Launius: What was it like? Can you describe it a little?

11  
12 Bain: Poof! [Laughter]. It made a lot of noise.

13  
14 Launius: It did?

15  
16 Bain: Of course, you know there was one before that fizzled out. So we were real  
17 happy to know this one went up ok.

18  
19 Launius: And how far away from the launch were you located with your radar system?

20  
21 Bain: Well, our little group went into the woods. I don't know just how far we went but  
22 that's where I was. When I heard about a blockhouse, that surprised me because as  
23 far as I'm concerned there was no blockhouse.

1 Launius: When you came down here Florida, of course, was segregated at the time.  
2 Did race relations in the area, was that an issue that anyone was concerned about? Did  
3 anything take place that you can recall during that particular time?  
4

5 Bain: The only thing that I was aware of, and this is something that is peculiar, is that  
6 my children would come home and complain about what the teachers said about these  
7 nice colored people. Now that's the only thing that I ever knew anything about.  
8 Because there was no show of that anywhere that I could see. For example, this little  
9 group that I talked about (the civilian group), we had a colored man on that. There was  
10 none of that disruption at all.  
11

12 Launius: Some fifty years after the fact, is there any significance or over riding  
13 importance that you would assign to the Bumper launch?  
14

15 Bain: Yes, I would because that was the beginning of the whole space program.  
16 Although we were aware that they would take certain steps to go further and further we  
17 had no idea what it would eventually come to. All of us were very proud of the fact that  
18 we were actually able to do something.  
19

20 Launius: I think that exhausts my questions. Is there anything else in particular that we  
21 ought to ask?  
22

23 Stan Starr: Liz, you mentioned there were two other ladies.  
24

25 Bain: Yes.

1  
2 Starr: Do you remember their names?

3  
4 Bain: Yes, one was Bea Sylvester and the other was Mary Taggart and both of them  
5 are dead. In fact the engineers that were in that van are dead, too. I guess I'm the old  
6 relic. [Laughter]

7  
8 Launius: If you were to summarize after the Bumper launch, can you tell us briefly  
9 about the rest of your career.

10  
11 Bain: Well, it's quite extensive as far as I'm concerned. [Laughter] Because when you  
12 think of fifty years you've got a lot to cover. But anyway, I got married the year after the  
13 Bumper with one of the guys that was with the Matador group. He was a GI but  
14 eventually turned out to be an officer. He provided a good home for us, and the children  
15 were happy to have a nice new father. And things worked out real good. Well from  
16 leaving at Patrick I went to Chanute Air Force Base, Illinois where he was assigned and  
17 lo and behold I ran into somebody who worked down here who convinced me that I  
18 should start back working again. So I went to work for the Weather Department, and it  
19 was the craziest things you ever saw I was responsible for writing all of their tests. I had  
20 to use three different typewriters because we had different symbols on these different  
21 typewriters. That eventually was something to do jumping from one to the other one.  
22 But after that at Chanute they had a good program working so they promoted me a  
23 couple grades, and I worked for the recruiting office for our GIs. It was up to me to  
24 write all the orders and things. So then after that, my husband was sent up to Duluth Air  
25 Force Base, Minnesota. So instead of getting a job there I got involved in volunteer

1 work and rock hunting and also well, being in the Officer's Wives Club. We had a big  
2 program to work with the city. So we worked more or less as volunteers as Red Cross  
3 for this one hospital, which was a welfare hospital. Let's see, after that it was his time to  
4 go to Goose Bay Labadore. So instead of me deciding to go there I decided to come  
5 back home to Melbourne where we owned a home. By this time, my children, as adults,  
6 were going to this and that and different activities of their own like banking and civil  
7 service and all kinds of things that they were getting interested in. So as a result, I went  
8 back to work at Patrick again for one year. Then after that we got sent to Malstrom Air  
9 Force Base, Montana when I worked as a clerk in Facilities Installation then back to  
10 Duluth, Minnesota, so that's where I ended up. (Note: As president of Duluth Air Force  
11 Base Officers Wives Club in October 1962.) But, we had picked up an interesting  
12 hobby because there was a course that the base had given on lapidary. So we learned  
13 how to find stones and what to do with them, so when my husband retired in 1962, we  
14 started a business that was the Bain's Rock Shop and we had such a successful  
15 business from 1969 to 1979, that we finally decided (since he wasn't feeling well) to give  
16 it up. So we traveled all over the world after that and just goofed off. He died about  
17 eight years ago, and I've been struggling with the yard ever since. [Laughter].

18  
19 Lori Walters: About your children. When they first came to Florida, what was their  
20 opinion of the area?

21  
22 Bain: They had fun, they really had fun. The first one was at Cocoa. The first big  
23 school dance came along, and my kids had never been exposed to long dresses or  
24 anything like this. But they had a school dance so it was up to me to go out and get  
25

1 them long dresses and all this stuff. They liked it. In fact, they're still friendly with  
2 people in Cocoa and also of course, in Melbourne.

3  
4 Launius: Thank you very much.

5  
6 Bain: You're welcome.